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# Intelligence: The Times Are Touchy

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 15 — The relationship between the Central Intelligence Agency and its Congressional oversight committees has been, at best, a marriage of convenience, a clash of cultures never far from rancorous discord.

Intelligence officers view their successes and failures as matters of great secrecy, some of which must be hidden "from inception to eternity." Members of Congress, tending toward spirited public debate, are inclined to point out mistakes, sometimes none too gently, when a Government agency errs.

Congress sees itself as an open advocate of the people and a watchdog over agencies that spend the people's tax money. The C.I.A., by contrast, believes that Congress has gone beyond its oversight role and has begun exposing agency secrets to further political ends.

Both sides confirm that under the Reagan Administration, relations between Capitol Hill and the intelligence agencies have become so tense that the Administration has at times declined to undertake covert operations because Congressional disclosure was viewed as a virtual certainty.

## Casey's Open Letter

The inherent contradictions bound up by Congressional oversight burst into the open Thursday night when William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, said in an open letter that the process had gone "seriously awry."

To Mr. Casey, Congressional oversight has become characterized by "off the cuff" comments that damage morale and disclose intelligence sources.

"It is time to acknowledge," Mr. Casey wrote, "that the process has gone seriously awry." He added: "If the oversight process is to work at all, it cannot do so on the front pages of American newspapers."

Senator Patrick Leahy, the deputy chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, called the Casey letter "unfortunate" and said today that it had inflamed an already delicate situation.

"On the one hand, you have the C.I.A. rejecting oversight," Mr. Leahy said. "And the Congress is saying, 'We'll get Casey for these comments.'"

Elected officials, to function as advocates for the public, say they must be permitted wide access to the inner workings of a secret agency that has been guilty of abuses. To Mr. Leahy, there is no support for a return to the "good old days" when, he said, the C.I.A., acting under little oversight,



Sygma / Diego Goldberg

William J.  
Casey

The New York Times

Senator Patrick  
Leahy

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Senator Dave  
Durenberger

became involved in such failed operations as the Bay of Pigs invasion.

The issue was heightened this year when the leadership of the Senate intelligence committee changed, with Senator Dave Durenberger, Republican of Minnesota, replacing Senator Barry Goldwater as chairman, and Senator Leahy, Democrat of Vermont, replacing Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan as deputy chairman.

From the beginning, both Senators Durenberger and Leahy said they favored greater public discussion of intelligence issues.

Accordingly, the committee staff has a press officer who responds to inquiries from journalists, and Mr. Durenberger and Mr. Leahy are fre-

received a secret briefing on an intelligence case.

Nevertheless, this year's ferment in the intelligence world has provided the Senators with plenty of grist for their preference for public debate.

For example, members of Congress have strenuously questioned the cases of Vitaly S. Yurchenko, the reputed senior K.G.B. officer who reportedly had defected to the West, and of Edward Lee Howard, a former C.I.A. officer who Mr. Yurchenko said had given the Russians important information about American intelligence gathering in Moscow.

Congressional criticism of the report about Mr. Howard had barely subsided when Mr. Yurchenko announced that he wanted to return to the Soviet Union. Members of Congress were immediately critical of the C.I.A.'s dealings with Mr. Yurchenko. Some viewed him as a Soviet plant who fooled the agency, and others said he was emotionally overwrought and had changed his mind, perhaps because of mistakes by his handlers in the agency.

In another spy case, both House and Senate members have criticized Navy security procedures involving John A. Walker Jr. And both Congress and the Administration are trying to learn who disclosed that the C.I.A. had a plan to undermine the Libyan leader, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, and that both intelligence committees had expressed reservations about it.

## A Requirement to Inform

Under laws passed in the 1970's after Congressional investigations of C.I.A. abuses, the Administration must inform Congress of any significant anticipated intelligence activity.

In a speech several months ago, Mr. Durenberger said the Reagan Administration had in several instances chosen not to initiate a covert action that was otherwise deemed to be appropriate because it could not trust Congress to keep it secret.

Indeed, he said, a lesser option was chosen. And Administration officials confirmed this assessment.

"The Administration," he told the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, "may prefer to do the wrong thing in secret, rather than doing the right thing in public."

**The oversight process cannot work 'on the front pages of American newspapers.'**

William J. Casey

quently available for interviews and have discussed a wide range of intelligence issues. Indeed, Mr. Casey said his letter was prompted by public comments from Mr. Durenberger regarding the agency's performance.

By contrast, the Democrat-controlled House intelligence committee has been less public.

Its chairman, Representative Lee H. Hamilton of Indiana rarely criticizes the agency's performance in his press interviews.

According to members of the committee, Mr. Hamilton prefers to work out differences with the C.I.A. in private.

The committee staff seldom responds to even routine inquiries from the press. In one instance, top committee aides refused to return calls asking whether the committee had